



In between

Director: Maysaloun Hamoud

Country: Israel

Date: 2016

A review by Mark Kermode for The Guardian:

This bittersweet debut feature from Maysaloun Hamoud is a spiky treat, an empowering tale of three Palestinian women living in Tel Aviv, each fighting their own battles for independence and fulfilment. Balancing tragicomic relationship blues with sharp sociopolitical observation, Hamoud's slyly subversive drama draws us deep into an often hidden world. As the title suggests, these women occupy a liminal space, caught between freedom and repression, religion and secularism, the past and the future. Theirs is a world in flux, in which the drugs and partying of the underground scene stand in stark contrast to the strict hypocrisies that dominate the cultural landscape. As one of them tells her devout father: "Some people live in palaces, but God knows what their life is like inside..."



Laila (Mouna Hawa) is a force of nature, a chain-smoking, leather-jacketed lawyer who can drink and snort the boys under the table and takes pride in overturning the conventions of her profession and her gender. She lives with Salma (Sana Jammalieh), an aspiring DJ who works long hours in kitchens and bars and whose strict Christian parents don't know she's gay. When strait-laced and studious Nour (Shaden Kanboura) arrives from Umm al-Fahm in northern Israel, the ultra-conservative Muslim lifestyle she leads is out of step with that of her new flatmates. No wonder Nour's sanctimonious

fiance, Wissam (Henry Andrawes), worries about their influence, eager to bring the marriage forward and remove his bride from such corrupting company.

At first glance, these women have very different goals and ambitions. Yet scratch the surfaces of their lives and the problems each face are not so dissimilar. Laila is in a whirlwind romance with Ziad (Mahmood Shalabi), who embraces her free spirit but becomes critical of the way she talks, dresses and smokes when his family are around. Salma may have found love in the arms of trainee doctor Dounia (Ahlam Canaan), but only as long as they can keep their relationship secret from Salma's mother, who is desperate to marry her off, and her father who threatens her with talk of the madhouse. As for Nour, she discovers in horrifying fashion just what is expected of the wife of an apparently upstanding citizen in a gruelling sequence that is made all the more alarming by Hamoud's sensitive directorial discretion.

In a Sight & Sound magazine interview, Hamoud calls this "an authentic picture of a kind of invisible life that we live here as a younger generation of Palestinians" and it's a claim that seems to ring true. Nothing about the lives of these women appears false or phoney, even when the narrative takes credibility-stretching detours into contrived revenge drama. Anchoring it all is a terrific ensemble cast that mixes experienced actors with first-time performers; Jammalieh, for example, is a real-life DJ and graphic designer, playing a character close to home.

Director of photography Itay Gross's loose-limbed camerawork adds to the vérité vibe, giving the performers room to breathe and ensuring that their environment remains a core part of the drama. Meanwhile, a thrumming soundtrack, which includes contributions from Palestinian hip-hop artists DAM,

provides a heady and infectious backdrop to the alternative lifestyle milieu.

Inevitable comparisons have been made with Lena Dunham's *Girls* and *Sex and the City*, but this has more in common with the feistiness of Pedro Almodóvar's early anarchic friendship fable *Pepi, Luci, Bom*



and *Other Girls Like Mom* than with either of those small-screen US antecedents. Citing directors Ken Loach and Hany Abu-Assad as influences, Hamoud identifies herself as part of a new wave of realist Palestinian cinema, looking beyond the conflicts of the West Bank and Gaza, and putting women proudly centre stage. Yet she is not afraid to portray the price of freedom in a patriarchal world – the closing shot of *In Between* is a masterful exercise in ambiguity, as enigmatic as the final moments of *The Graduate* or *The Long Good Friday*, in which the characters' silence speaks volumes.

Hamoud, too, has paid a price. After being criticised for taking Israeli state funding, she found herself the subject of death threats and fatwas from fundamentalists, accused of disparaging or corrupting Muslim women, particularly in areas such as Umm al-Fahm. Elsewhere, *In Between* has been rapturously received, with Hamoud receiving the Women in Motion Young Talents award at this year's Cannes festival. Isabelle Huppert, who selected her for the award, declared that “the free spirited and joyful women [Hamoud] portrays... are true heroines of our time”. That's a sentiment with which I wholeheartedly concur.

From: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/sep/24/in-between-review-maysaloun-hamoud-female-muslim-flatmates-tel-aviv>

The Heart Of Britain (UK, 1941, 10 mins)

The Heart of Britain was shown throughout the autumn and early winter of 1940. In less equivocal fashion than its immediate predecessor, *London Can Take It!*, the film depicts an emboldened nation embarking upon a new, offensive phase of the war and marking a clean break with the isolation, defeat, and mere survival of the second half of 1940... the film ends on an unashamedly propagandist note yet, for Jennings, this call to arms could somehow be reconciled with the internationalist principles of tolerance and a generosity of spirit.



From: *booklet accompanying the DVD, The Complete Humphrey Jennings, Vol 2.*